

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986)

Georgia O'Keeffe was born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin on November 15, 1887. O'Keeffe was one of seven children and they grew up on a farm. When she was ten years old she and her sisters took painting lessons. By the time she was thirteen years old, she knew she wanted to be an artist. Georgia was always very independent and usually did not do things the other children did. She spent a great deal of time alone and said she had her imagination as company. Throughout her life she rebelled against being like anyone else. When the other girls dressed in fancy clothes she would wear plain dark clothes and she continued this her whole life and it became her trademark. Georgia was always aware of shapes, colors and patterns around her.

At the age of eighteen O'Keeffe studied at The Art Institute of Chicago and then later at the Art Students League in New York. She did not like the fact that most of her art teachers and classes were teaching painting that was very realistic and she did not feel she was able to use her imagination the way she wanted to. Georgia wanted to paint things that were important to her and to use beautiful color. She left New York and went to study in Virginia. At the University of Virginia she finally had a teacher that felt a painter's most important duty was to fill space in a beautiful way. O'Keeffe agreed with this thinking. Unfortunately she ran out of money and had to leave the University for a job in Texas teaching drawing. Georgia found beautiful landscapes in Texas and it became a very important part of her paintings.

In 1915 she met a well-known New York photographer named Alfred Stieglitz. He loved her paintings and she reluctantly let him display them in his gallery. From that very first exhibit O'Keeffe's painting became well-known. O'Keeffe and Stieglitz became very good friends and in 1924 they were married. O'Keeffe and her husband lived in an apartment on the 30th floor of a hotel in New York City, where she was inspired to paint the lovely views from her home. One of her favorite subjects was flowers. She said that most people in the city rush around so, that they have no time to look at a flower and she painted them large enough so they would see her flowers whether they wanted to or not! Many times she would paint them very close-up and only show us part of the flower itself. She gave us this new perspective because she wanted us to look at the beauty of the flower in a new light. She became very famous for her larger-than-life paintings. The way she lived was larger than life also. At a time when women's lives were limited she made sure her life was free and limitless as the vast, open landscape where she was born.

Early in her marriage, Georgia took a summer trip to New Mexico. She fell in love with the never-ended landscapes and open skies there. She continued to return there every year to vacation and paint. After her husband passed away, in 1949 O'Keeffe moved to New Mexico permanently. Over the years, Georgia's eyesight began to deteriorate and painting became difficult. She could no longer paint without some assistance, and she hired an assistant, Juan Hamilton to help her. Georgia ended up moving in with Hamilton and his family in Santa Fe, so they could help care for her. She died in 1986 at the age of 98 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. During her lifetime Georgia O'Keeffe painted more than 900 paintings and at the time of her death her estate was worth \$50 million!